

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of manufacturing a honeycomb structure comprising the steps of:

making a clay by mixing and kneading a silicon carbide powder raw material, a metal silicon raw material, an organic binder, and a raw material containing alkaline earth metal;

forming the clay to form a formed body; and

pre-firing and firing the formed body,

wherein the firing is performed at a temperature of 1400—1800°C in a protective container made of silicon carbide in which a solid containing aluminum is placed,

wherein the solid containing aluminum is ~~composed of at least one of a fire-resistant particulate body having a grain size in a range from 0.01 to 1 mm and a fire-resistant block body having water absorption equal to or above 0.05% by weight, and is placed such~~ that a separation distance from the body to be fired is equal to or below 50 cm.

2. (Currently Amended) ~~The~~ A method of manufacturing a honeycomb structure according to claim 1, comprising the steps of:

making a clay by mixing and kneading a silicon carbide powder raw material, a metal silicon raw material, an organic binder, and a raw material containing alkaline earth metal;

forming the clay to form a formed body; and

pre-firing and firing the formed body,

wherein the firing is performed in a protective container made of silicon carbide in which a solid containing aluminum is placed,

wherein the solid ~~has a total weight ratio of~~ contains aluminum in the solid  
~~placed in the protective container equal to or above 0.01 relative to a total weight of a fired~~  
~~material. 1% in terms of a weight composition ratio in oxide equivalent.~~

3. (Currently Amended) ~~The A~~ method of manufacturing a honeycomb structure  
~~according to claim 1, comprising the steps of:~~

making a clay by mixing and kneading a silicon carbide powder raw material,  
a metal silicon raw material, an organic binder, and a raw material containing alkaline earth  
metal;

forming the clay to form a formed body; and

pre-firing and firing the formed body,

wherein the firing is performed in a protective container made of silicon  
carbide in which a solid containing aluminum is placed,

wherein the solid containing aluminum is ~~equal to or above 1% in terms of a~~  
~~weight composition ratio in oxide equivalent.~~ composed of a fire-resistant block body having  
water absorption equal to or above 0.05%.

4-8. (Canceled)